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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HOSTS GHANA'S NPP AND NDC: BEGINNING
THE BRIDGE-BUILDING

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador recently hosted lunches for the leadership of each of Ghana's major political parties, the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the ruling New Patriotic People's Party (NPP). The NDC views the NPP as intolerant and opposed the GOG passage of a law to allow overseas Ghanaians to vote. The NPP officials portrayed their party as conciliatory. They downplayed perceptions of corruption in Ghana and said they could not understand opposition to the Representation of the People (ROPA) law. Both parties requested assistance with party capacity building. Ambassador stressed the need for dialogue between the parties and committed the Embassy to helping build political bridges. End summary.

Lunch with the NDC

¶2. (SBU) NDC officials believe the GOG lacks the will to fight corruption. They complained that debt cancellation and Millennium Challenge Account funds are rewarding the NPP government and not Ghana as a whole. They said if the NDC wins the 2008 election, it will implement a social democratic agenda, giving greater priority to social sector projects such as education and health.

¶3. (SBU) The NDC officials said the NPP does not tolerate internal and inter-party opposition. They complained that the NPP devalues anything associated with the former PNDC regime, undermining Ghana's multi-party and consensus-oriented culture.

¶4. (SBU) The most worrisome example of this, they said, was the NPP's handling of the Representation of the People (Amendment) law (ROPAL). NDC Chairman Dr. Kwabena Adjei fears the bill is a mechanism for the NPP to rig the 2008 election, noting that the NDC does not have resources to monitor overseas polling. He and other NDC officials complained about the lack of consultation on ROPAL, in contrast to previous election-related disputes which were brokered through an Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC), under the auspices of the Electoral Commission (EC). NDC General Secretary Johnson Asiedu Nketia said the GOG might take legal action to force the EC to implement the bill.

¶5. (U) Ambassador noted the importance of a strong opposition in ensuring Ghana's democracy. She noted that the Embassy tries to reach out to all Ghanaians and that assistance such as the MCA funds are designed to help the Ghanaian people, not just the government. We recognize that previous governments contributed to Ghana's achievements, she added, hoping that the NDC would find a way to dialogue with the NPP. She committed to help build political bridges.

Lunch with the NPP

¶6. (SBU) NPP executives praised the NPP as a conciliatory

party preparing Ghana for a bright future. President Kufuor has brought members of different parties into his government and, according to National Treasurer Gifty Ama Asantewaa Ayeh, is sometimes "even too nice" toward opponents. They cited the recent example of Wayo Seini, the NDC Member of Parliament who recently left the NDC and has been welcomed back into the NPP (he was previously an NPP MP.) She pointed out that the NPP also supported the National Reconciliation Commission, which has helped heal historical wounds.

¶17. (SBU) The NPP executives also stated that various factions within the NPP have patched up differences following the close election for party chairman in their November convention. NPP Chairman Peter Mac Manu highlighted how he greeted his NPP opponent Stephen Ntim with open arms after the vote. He also downplayed inter-party friction. Although there is tension between some of the supporters of the parties, the party leadership meets regularly and jokes as friends, he said.

¶18. (SBU) When asked about corruption, Asantewaa Ayeh said corruption was not a major problem in Ghana compared to elsewhere in Africa. She reiterated the president's long-standing offer to deal with corruption if presented with evidence. Anti-corruption institutions exist to handle the problem, the executives said.

¶19. (SBU) Asked about the ROPAL, they pointed out that the NDC had introduced the law in 1996 and that it conformed to the constitution. They questioned why the NDC would now oppose it and asked if the donor community was against it. Asantewaa Ayeh said there are 18 contenders for the party's nomination in the 2008 presidential elections, although none of them are official because they have not yet paid their

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nominating fees.

¶10. (U) Ambassador said the United States did not take a position on the ROPA law but stressed the importance of fair and transparent processes and institutions. She highlighted our strong bilateral relations, while noting the need to strengthen anti-corruption institutions. She stressed the need to maintain a process of dialogue with other parties and she welcomed continued interaction with the NPP leadership.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) The lunches, in conjunction with other political outreach efforts by the Ambassador over the past two weeks (reported septel), have helped build the Embassy's relationship with Ghana's main parties. The NDC Chairman was visibly touched that the Ambassador presented him with a birthday cake (the first in his life, he said). The NDC officials were passionate and intellectual. Their NPP counterparts were more casual and self-satisfied. Executives of both parties requested capacity building for their parties, which we will seek to address. We will look for ways to bridge the unhealthy divide between the NPP and NDC. Unfortunately, these lunches did not reveal much common ground.

